SPORTS

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Indy Car Name Triggers Latest Spa

Auto racing: Latest battle in feud between rival groups involves use of trademark name. Sunday's Long Beach race might be last time CART uses the designation.

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Would a rose by any other name smell as sweet? Or, would Indy car racing by any other name be as exciting to watch?

The sweet-smelling-rose question may never be answered, but Indy cars—the kind that Roger Penske and Carl Haas own and Al Unser Jr., Bobby Rahal, Robby Gordon and Michael Andretti drive—may be facing extinction. At least in name.

Next Sunday's Toyota Grand Prix of Long Beach, a 105-lap trip around a 1.59-mile circuit laid out alongside the seashore, may be the last time a race sanctioned by Championship Auto Racing Teams will formally be described as an Indy car race. That is, if Tony George, whose family owns the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and holds rights to the Indy trademark, has his way.

Moreover, with the Indianapolis 500 no longer part of the PPG Indy Car World Series, the Long Beach Grand Prix becomes the premier event of the 16-race series.

The split between CART, which has trolled Indy car racing since 1979, an Indy Racing League, which George f last year with the Indianapolis 500 linchpin, has widened, probably to the p no return. It has escalated since th George announced he was reserving 25 tions in the Indy 500's 33-car field for d in his IRL series.

CART responded by scheduling a com tive race, the U.S. 500, at the Penske- Michigan International Speedway in B lyn, Mich., on the same day. It will begi hours after the start of the Indy 500, fans an opportunity to watch portions o races—Indy on ABC and CART on ESPN

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The latest breach is over use of the CART trademark name: IndyCar. If George prevails, the Long Beach race will be the last one using the designation, at least in that style. And, of course, the fans, bound by no legal niceties, will continue calling Indy cars Indy cars.

But there is more than semantics between the feuding groups and the two May 26 races will be farther apart in philosophy than in miles. Michigan International being only about 250 miles north of Indianapolis.

The traditional Indy 500 ... have all the pomp and ceremony that 80 years as "the greatest spectacle in racing" would dictate, but with a substantially inferior field of drivers in older equipment. And there is some doubt that the IRL will be able to field 33 cars for traditional starting number because there may not be enough engines to go around.

Three of the Indy car engine builders—Ilmor Mercedes-Benz, Honda and Toyota—will not do business with the IRL, and Ford Cosworth has released only a limited number of its engines. The majority of IRL power plants are variations of the Menard Buicks, which are not used by CART teams.

Scott Brayton, in a Menard-powered car, ran 237.555 mph at Indianapolis Wednesday, the fastest unofficial lap in the track's history. Fast as they are, however, the Menards are not long on reliability.

At Michigan, the U.S. 500, no different from the Marlboro 500 that will be run on that track July 28, is an attempt by CART leadership to embarrass the IRL and to placate sponsors who are accustomed to seeing their names in large type during the month of May. It will have, however, an elite corps of drivers, more foreign than American, in 1996 model cars.

"How can they call themselves IndyCar when neither their drivers nor their cars will ever run at Indianapolis?" asked Jack Long, executive director of IRL. "They're so determined to divorce themselves from Indy, you would think they would want a different name."

But no. Shortly after CART received notice from George on March 16 that he was giving them 30 days to stop using the term *IndyCar* or any associated term, CART filed suit to confirm its continued use of the name and logo. A licensing agreement reached in 1991 gave CART the right to use IndyCar in all its promotions.

George claimed the scheduling of a competitive race at the same time as the Indy 500 nullified the agreement.

"The agreement was entered into based on the premise we were going to try to keep this sport somewhat unified," George said. "It has become obvious we have different philosophies, different principles and we are going in different directions."

Other than saying that George's complaint was without merit, CART officials would not comment on that situation.

The main issue comes down to control and direction of open-wheel, open-cockpit racing in the United States.

The CART board of directors, made up of its entire roster of car owners, appears headed toward a more global series, a direction favored by sponsors such as Texaco, Marlboro, Budweiser, Pennzoil, Miller and others seeking worldwide markets. Already there are races in Brazil, Australia and Canada, and one is planned next year in Japan. In another year or two, there will probably be one in Germany.

The CART series is a mix of superspeedway and mile ovals, road courses and temporary street circuits, such as Long Beach.

The IRL's main thrust is to develop American drivers to race on American oval tracks and it has no intention of crossing the border or racing on road or street courses. The IRL is, in name, part of the United States Auto Club—from which CART split in the late '70s. But the IRL is largely directed by George and friends.

Several weeks ago, it appeared that a compromise was in the works. George and Penske met in Pebble Beach, where both were playing in the AT&T National Pro-Am golf tournament, and came to an informal agreement that would have enlarged the Indy 500 field to around 42 cars, thus satisfying the guarantees to 25 IRL drivers and opening sufficient spots for CART regulars.

'I'm going to miss being at the Indy 500, but it's not going to happen. . . . It's their loss. And it's going to be the fans' loss too. Indy is sold out and the stands will be full, but they're going to be very disappointed when they see who's racing, and who's not racing.'

AL UNSER
Two-time winner of the Indy 500

But when the issue was presented to the CART board, it was voted down unanimously, apparently more for long-term issues than for this year's race. For 1997, the IRL has announced new chassis and engine regulations that will make all existing Indy cars ineligible for the Indy 500.

The IRL will deal with that by building new cars to those specifications—IRL cars will have engines built by Oldsmobile and Nissan—but CART has no plans to go along with those new rules.

"We are committed to the long-term viability of [the U.S. 500]," said Andrew Craig, president and chief executive officer of CART. "Neither myself nor any of the members of CART are prepared to be bullied [by] or kowtow to the [Indy] Speedway.

"The whole essence of the IRL is to break up the sport, basically. The sport has enjoyed terrific growth over the past few years . . . a growth that has come from the good efforts of the track promoters, CART, our individual teams, our sponsors and our drivers. We are the people who have been building the sport."

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There is a strong possibility that the second U.S. 500, on Memorial Day weekend in 1997, will be held at another of Penske's tracks, the about-to-be-built California Speedway in Fontana.

No one, least of all the drivers who dream of racing at Indianapolis from the moment they pull on their first helmets as teenagers, likes the conflict.

"I'm going to miss being at the Indy 500, but it's not going to happen," said Al Unser Jr., winner of two Indy 500s and a member of the family most closely associated with Indianapolis. An Unser had been in every race there since 1963 [illegible] failed to qualify last year [illegible] going [illegible] Indy] is missing the best drivers, best cars, best owners in the world. It's their loss. And it's going to be the fans' loss too. Indy is sold out and the stands will be full, but they're going to be very disappointed when they see who's racing, and who's not racing."

Unser pointed out that CART's trend toward a global image is nothing new.

"The Indianapolis 500 has been an international event ever since Tony Hulman [George's grandfather] took the speedway over after the war," he said. "It became the most important race in the world and Europeans like Jimmy Clark and Graham Hill and Jackie Stewart came over to be in it, and foreign drivers are still coming.

"What makes the split so hard to understand is that CART has worked very hard to make our series the best in the world. We want to show the world what we can do. We're the only series where cars run 240 mph and turn left. It's that simple.

"The IRL people say, 'Indy makes stars, stars don't make Indy,' and I agree. But once they make stars, Indy needs them to come back. Right now, they're dumping on the stars they've made."

Most of the stars, however, will be at Long Beach, starting with practice and qualifying on Friday.

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